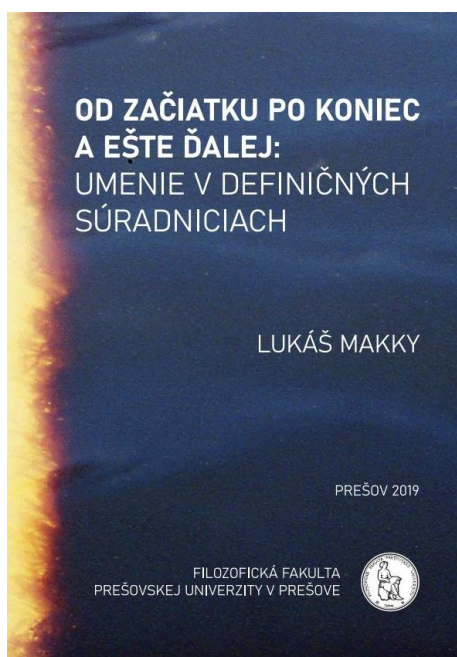


**MAKKY, Lukáš (2019): *Od začiatku po koniec a ešte ďalej: umenie v definičných súradniciach*. [From the Beginning till the End and Beyond: The Art in Definitional Coordinates]. Prešov: Filozofická fakulta, Prešovská univerzita v Prešove, Opera Philosophica. 256 pp.**

Peter Gurský; Peter.Gursky@smail.unipo.sk, Jana Migašová; jana.migasova@unipo.sk,

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3633264>



The second original monograph by Lukáš Makky brings the results of a research focused on the variable and unstable field of definition and definability of art, which in its practice and development is constantly trying to escape from safe definitional boundaries. The text is a logical continuation, a deepening and a contextualization of Makky's first monograph (2017), in which he explored the circumstances of the emergence of art forms in its primeval beginnings. In seeking answers about the end or the ends of art, the author starts by reflecting on the beginning of art and its elastic boundaries in the 20th and 21st century. For his analysis and problematization, the author chooses an impressive theoretical platform, including structuralism, analytic and evolutionist aesthetics, institutional theory, and positions that have anticipated or commented on the end of art (from Hegel to Belting and Danto). The author, however, states that “*it is*

*surprising to what extent the problem of the origin of art is absent in discussions about the end of art*” (Makky, 2019, p. 12).

In the chapter about the first art (WHEN, HOW AND WHY IT ALL STARTED) he distinguishes two 'lines' of thinking about art within its historical framework. The first line presents an approach in which the history of art is seen as starting already with pre-historical graphic art. This was made possible by the first archeological excavations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which expanded the history of art to a period preceding antiquity. In this way, the identity of the so-called Western art as the sole heir to antiquity is questioned. The second line of thinking about primordial art is based on artifactuality. The author sets out and presents, in a rather generous space, two conceptions that supports his attempts at definition. The first comes from Ellen Dissanayake, who, in an evolutionary perspective, sees art as a specifically behaviour of human beings as a species, one that has evolved from other activities and that “*must have had some internal motivation or adaptational justification!*” (Makky, 2019, p. 27). Moreover, it seems to us that the qualitative

differentiation between art and non-art as two modes of human activity, as well as the ritualization and artification from an ethological-evolutionist point of view are, for the purposes of the book, extremely important and also appealing for the reader. definitely yes

As his second key source for defining art through the prism of primordial art, the author draws on Stephen Davies. Like Dissanayake and Jerrold Levinson, Davies is an aesthete who features in many texts of the author of this book. Together with the structuralists, Davies' and Dissanayake's ideas form the theoretical ground for Makky's thinking about the origins and ends of art. In particular, the author stresses the differences and similarities between Dissanayake's and Davies' approaches in order to obtain a fruitful platform to problematize the definition of the origin of art.

*"Despite the similarities and simultaneously theoretical competition between Ellen Dissanayake and Stephen Davies, they seem ideal to illustrate the possible origins of art. In his examination, Stephen Davies is aware of a number of facts, he is perhaps intuitively even suspicious of the limits of focusing on the material artefacts of the past, and also because of this he combines this object of investigation with artistic experience and human behaviour. What he actually pursues is the way art was created, whereas Ellen Dissanayake concentrated on its circumstances"* (Makky, 2019, p. 41).

The theoretical introduction which investigates the beginnings of art is followed by the chapter ART AND NON-ART OR HOW TO DISTINGUISH THE CHAIR FROM THE "CHAIR". The title of the chapter already hints that the discussion will be pursued on a 'battlefield' in which artistic practice always wins (since Manet – if we agree with Bourdieu), which constantly strives for its own transgression and 'escape' from the safe settlements provided by art theories. This chapter highlights the difficulty of defining art by showcasing examples of provocative, transgressive works, as well as by considering some theoretical approaches that tried to account for the situation of art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Goodman, Kesner, Aldrich, Chalumeau and others). The author dedicates a separate chapter to the examination of art's contextual framework, in which he investigates how artworks' purposes and functions change in different historical periods and social settings. The author chooses some notions from Jan Mukařovský and Nelson Goodman as the key concepts for problematizing the function of art.

*"On the one hand, each work of art has a stable place that determines the context, on the other hand it can be flexible and adapt to the nature of the general structure of which it is only a small part. It is as if the contextually determined moment of the past had different 'physical laws' than the overall structure. Two parallel worlds interconnected, operating on a different principle"* (Makky, 2019, pp. 53–54).

The author then addresses the problems raised by institutional theories, as well as the issues we face when we want to define art as a term. This problem is illustrated by the experiments of Morris Weitz, Berys Gaut and others. Perhaps the most important obstacle for the task of defining art is its historical character, and any examination of past phenomena, according to Makky (2019, p. 108), manifests itself *"in the present-past dialectics (one or more), the present and the past human"*. Finally, the author gives space to Gaut's cluster definition and concludes that both traditional and recent attempts at defining art by setting criteria must be captured in principle, and – with this we fully agree – it is necessary to *"adjust the rules according to which an object with certain properties can begin to be understood as art"* (Makky, 2019, p. 112). According to the author, the advantage represented by the cluster definition is the fact that we can operate with multiple criteria, which is more appropriate to capture the complexity, dynamics and geographical-cultural diversity of the use and understanding of the concept of art. To present his own attempt to define art, Makky goes back to his recent publications and uses a cluster definition of prehistoric art (Makky, 2017, pp. 100–101). He

criticizes this definition and considers its weaknesses when applied to contemporary art, thus arriving at a revised version. The author argues for the individual points of this cluster through reference to concrete artworks (by Duchamp, Hirst, Šille and others), thus avoiding speculative theoretical reduction of the issue. The author also demonstrates his efforts to correct his own ideas and to contextually incorporate his own definition in the chapter that precedes the final words and summary: *Alternatives to the definition (or another perspective)*. In the division of modern art definitions into “a) linguistic (discursive) and b) definitional”, he places himself within the second group, in the attempts to establish criteria for a definition. The reader is thus lead to criticize the relationship between the two groups, as the attempts at definition are also present in the focus of the first, discursive position. Attempts at definitions play a 'game', to use Danto's words: a game of 'world of art' and become part of an institutional tissue in which art transforms and reformulates itself as a result of this game.

However, setting some definitional criteria is absolutely necessary for the existence of (art) criticism. When we discuss the 'ends', like the end of the criticism that has been announced so many times, and we look at the current situation of journalism, we can conclude that the evaluation aspect of the criticism has disappeared entirely. However, the need to distinguish art from non-art, like the need to distinguish the good from the bad, what is true from pretentious, what is prime from what is trash, is gradually felt on the basis of our talking about art. An effort to differentiate and identify quality seems thus to be the basic driving force of this book, which ultimately represents a rare attempt to intertwine broadly designed theoretical resources, not only because of the use it makes of diverse and recent concepts, but also because of the interconnections it draws between Slovak, Czech and foreign literature, by which there are also traced international lines of reflection on art, in other words, about its ends. The book also represents an outcome of the number of activities that in recent years have been developed and presented in Prešov's aesthetic milieu, giving rise to journal and anthological studies, as well as to conferences aimed at providing a platform for (international and interdisciplinary) professional discussions.

However, we would like to criticize here the author of the book:

*“The unflattering situation in which contemporary art is found is caused by the fact that it was not only preceded by an artistically dynamic period and that it came after Modernism and Postmodernism and is basically in a state of hiatus and search for itself, which came with Impressionism, but somehow it can never stabilize to the extent that both the lay and professional public are sufficiently convinced and satisfied. It may seem to the current recipient that such an artistic turbulent period has never existed before” (Makky, 2019, p. 134).*

We do not think that art really finds itself in an unflattering situation, today. Rather, it is art theory and art history, as part of the humanities, that seem to experience this unflattering situation. What contemporary art demonstrates, as the *enfant terrible* of contemporary culture is an ironic and often mocking finger, which points at the impotence of the 'theoretical tools' by which we 'care' of art. That is why the self-reflective nature of this book is so important and necessary in our cultural and academic context. The final part (THE END OF ART AS THE MILESTONE OF ART HISTORY) represents an ambitious attempt that perhaps is not fulfilled to the extent promised. The author often reiterates his positivist approach to the problem, thus avoiding unilateral criticism of the concept in question and arriving to a consideration of the possible consequences of the existence but also the absence of the end of art. On the one hand, it must be recognised, to avoid unjustified criticism, that the author 'plays' with multiple, even contradictory, options. In the end he writes: “[...] when I decided to adopt and accept the concept of the end of art for research purposes (I was not inclined to criticize or defend) [...], I knew that I had to reconsider the history and overall concept of art history.

*That is why in the perspective of the end of art one can understand its history in the three great stages, while the end of (certain) art is here viewed as a historical milestone*” (Makky, 2019, pp. 213–214).

He refers to (a) art before art, (b) art before the end of art, and (c) art after the end of art. For the sake of this classification, he attempts to define 'the last end of art,' namely, when 'art before the end of art' was substituted/replaced/superimposed by 'art after the end of art'. Makky's theoretical approach involves the normative assessment or determination of the exact moment in which we can talk about the end of art, a moment that could be the subject of discussion, or even sharp criticism. However, the author avoids the normative solution when he writes:

*“So the end of art was not a matter of hours or days, but years, and I am convinced that, as in 1872 [explaining on the example of Claude Manet's painting *Impression* – authors' note], the art world began to collapse definitively, and nothing could save it, so equally in 1895 [the invention of film – authors' note] it comes to a purification of old art. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at least the European scene was ready to build new art and art history could start again (Didi-Huberman, 2006). Adding Benjamin's reproducibility, by year 1900 we can define the beginning of art after the end of art”* (Makky, 2019, p. 180).

By the end, one has the impression that the author is eventually arguing for the reality of the end of art, a conclusion with which, on the basis of the problems discussed before in the text, it is not possible to agree. This may lead one to question the whole logic of the findings and even the legitimacy of the conclusions. However, the entire final part of the publication is merely a working hypothesis, one that leads the author concludes that there is a kind of dualist opposition of opinions, so that either “(1) *The end of art never occurred, and if so, we do not know about it.* [or - authors' note] (2) *The end of art has come so many times that we have become accustomed to it: smaller ends are at the same time new beginnings that create (or are initiated by) new styles and artistic trends; the bigger ones (ends of art) are true historical milestones*” (Makky, 2019, p. 217).

---

Mgr. Peter Gurský  
(external PhD. student)  
Faculty of Arts  
Institute of Ethics and Bioethics  
Presov/Slovakia  
Peter.Gursky@smai.unipo.sk

---

Mgr. Jana Migašová, PhD.  
University of Presov in Presov  
Faculty of Arts  
Institute of Aesthetics and Art Culture  
Presov/Slovakia  
jana.migasova@unipo.sk

---

[www.espes.ff.unipo.sk](http://www.espes.ff.unipo.sk)

---